

MUSIC FOR CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
Olly Wilson • Peter Lieberson
Bernard Rands • John Thow

NEUMA



THE BOSTON MUSICA VIVA
Richard Pittman, Music Director

Olly Wilson (born 1937 St. Louis, Missouri) attended the St. Louis Public Schools. His higher education includes a B.M. degree from Washington University, St. Louis (1959), a M. M. degree from the University of Illinois (1960) and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Iowa (1964). Mr. Wilson studied composition with Robert Wykes, Robert Kelley and Phillip Bezanson. He has played jazz piano and bass with local groups in St. Louis and in 1969, studied electronic music at the Studio for Experimental Music, University of Illinois. Mr. Wilson has been a member of several orchestras as a bass viol player, including the St. Louis Philharmonic Orchestra, St. Louis Summer Chamber Players, and the Cedar Rapids Symphony Orchestra. He has held faculty positions at Florida A & M University and Oberlin Conservatory of Music. He is presently a Professor of Music at University of California, Berkeley. His compositions include chamber works, orchestral works, and works for the electronic media. The Boston, Cleveland, St. Louis, Dallas, San Francisco, Baltimore, Oakland, Houston, Minneapolis, and Atlanta symphony orchestras have performed his works. He was the recipient of the 1968 Dartmouth Arts Council Prize, the first international competition for electronic compositions, for his work *Cetus*. Wilson has been awarded commissions from Pitzer College (1972), the Oakland Symphony Orchestra (1973, 1981), the San Francisco Chamber Music Society (1976), the National Endowment for the Arts (1973, 1985), the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1970, 1980), the Fromm Foundation (1970), the Kousevitsky Foundation (1984), the Houston Symphony (1986) and the New York Philharmonic (1990). Other awards include two Guggenheim Fellowships, an award for outstanding achievement in music composition from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1974. He was a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome in 1968. In addition to his activities as a composer, Mr. Wilson has published scholarly articles on African and Afro-American music and has conducted numerous concerts featuring contemporary music.

A City Called Heaven was commissioned by the Boston Musica Viva ensemble and given its world premiere in April 1989. The title of the composition is taken from a traditional Black American spiritual whose principal theme serves as the musical inspiration for the central slow middle movement of the piece. The chorus of this spiritual has the following text:

Sometimes I am tossed and driven-lord
Sometimes I don't know where to roam
I've heard of a city called Heaven
I'm trying to make it my home.

The composition contains three movements in a slow-fast-slow arrangement, each of which is inspired by different genres of African-American music transformed by my own contemporary musical language. The first movement is based on a reinterpretation of a blues "riff"—a short definitive melodic motive that, in traditional practice, is repeated against a changing harmonic background. The piece opens with a somewhat rhetorical statement of a riff, whose inherent "swing" qualities gradually take on greater importance as the piece progresses. The movement utilizes a great deal of unison writing, cross rhythms and blueslike melodic patterns, that collectively create a composed realization of an abstract blues improvisation. After the movement builds to a climax, there is a short contrasting harmonically static section before the return of an altered version of the opening blues riff.

The second movement seeks to evoke the character and sensibilities associated with the original spiritual in a new musical context. After a brief introduction featuring the clarinet, there ensues a series of short sections which, while sharing similar musical ideas, contrast with one and other in character, texture, and tempo. There gradually emerges an altered version of the first line of the spiritual stated

cantabile in the viola and violin. This music is then commented upon, expanded and modified by the entire ensemble. In a broad sense, the entire movement is a contemporary musical reflection on the original spiritual.

The last movement, which opens with an aggressive percussion solo, is dominated by virtuoso passages for the piano in the lower register and percussion. The basic musical gestures associated with these two prominent instruments are inspired by rhythmic dynamism of the African-American music genre "Boogie Woogie." The entire ensemble, beginning with pizzicato strings, shares in the development of this basic musical material that leads to several episodes whose distinct musical ideas grow out of previous sections. Ultimately, a series of duets between the percussion and piano culminate in a riff-like ensemble statement that brings closure to the movement.

—Olly Wilson

Peter Lieberson (born 1946, New York City) now lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia with his wife Ellen and three daughters. His music first came to international attention in 1983 when his *Piano Concerto*, written for his long-time friend Peter Serkin, was premiered by Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra for the orchestra's centennial celebrations. He is currently composing a work for the Munich Biennale, called *King Gesar*, which features pianists Peter Serkin and Emmanuel Ax and cellist Yo Yo Ma. He has been a guest composer and conductor at Tanglewood, at the Music Today Festival in Tokyo and at the Aldeburgh Festival in England. Lieberson's principal teachers in composition were Milton Babbitt, Charles Wuorinen, Donald Martino and Martin Boykan. He completed his Ph.D. degree at Brandeis University and began teaching at Harvard University in 1984. In 1987 he was appointed as Harvard's first Gardner Cowles Associate Professor of the

Humanities. Lieberman is a senior student of the late Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist master who was the founder of Shambhala Training, a secular meditation and cultural program. Lieberman has been involved in teaching and administrating Shambhala Training since 1977. In 1988, Lieberman resigned from Harvard University to assume the post of executive director of Shambhala Training International in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Raising the Gaze was composed in 1988 for a consortium consisting of the Boston Musica Viva, the San Francisco Contemporary Chamber Players and the Aeolian Chamber Players of New York. I composed *Raising the Gaze* quickly, with the feeling of executing a set of brushstrokes in thick black ink. The music is energetic, dance-like and clearly demarcated. The piece is essentially divided into three parts. The first part itself has two sections, different in tempo, but each one fast and perky. The middle part of the piece is a “slow dance” in which a piccolo solo is accompanied by sharp drum strokes and piano chords out of which arise clouds of string harmonics. The final part of the piece begins with a bravura violin solo and ends with a drum solo accompanied by the other instruments recapitulating the opening. A brief recall of the slow music is abruptly ended by a final stroke of the drum.

—Peter Lieberman

Bernard Rands' music has established him as a major figure among his generation of composers. Through some eighty works written for a wide range of performance genres, the originality and distinctive character of his music has emerged—a “plangent lyricism,” a “dramatic intensity,” a “musicality and clarity of idea” and a “sophisticated and elegant technical mastery”—qualities he developed

from his early studies with Dallapiccola, Maderna and Berio. His works (commissioned by soloists, ensembles and orchestras) are regularly performed and broadcast in many countries. Since emigrating to the United States in 1975, Rands has been honored by awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, BMI, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Koussevitzky Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Fromm Foundation. Most recent commissions include an orchestral work for the new Suntory concert hall in Tokyo; a work for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra for the BBC London; a work for the Cleveland Chamber Symphony; for the Group for Contemporary Music, New York; for the Robert Page Singers, Cleveland; an a cappella chorus work commissioned jointly by Musica Sacra, the Dale Warland Singers and Chanticleer. Rands currently has commissions from the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Quartet.

As a conductor, Rands is recognized by composers, performers, audiences and critics for his performances of a large and diverse repertoire of contemporary music with ensembles and orchestras around the world. Mr. Rands' work *Canti del Sole* for tenor and orchestra, premiered by Paul Sperry and the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Zubin Mehta, was awarded the 1984 Pulitzer Prize in Music. His work *Le Tambourin* won the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award in 1986.

Bernard Rands is currently Professor of Composition at Harvard University and Composer in Residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

"...in the receding mist..." is a short piece for flute, harp and string trio which takes its title from an early poem by Samuel Beckett. The piece is based upon three musical characters—a simple, folk-like melodic line which itself is made up of a Baroque rhythmic figure and a mordent/turn figure. These three are gradually elaborated and transformed until they create a complex network of relationships and

references within an elaborate texture. Out of this emerges a long cantilena flute line. This latter, supported by sparse accompaniment from the ensemble concludes the work.

“...in the receding mist...” is dedicated in friendship to composer Jacob Druckman and was written as a gift for his sixtieth birthday. The work was commissioned by ONDINE Ensemble, London and the Arts Council of Great Britain.

John Thow (born 1949, Los Angeles) was raised in Ventura, California, where he began early composition study with Adolph Weiss. He continued work in composition at the University of Southern California with Ingolf Dahl and Ramiro Cortes, at Harvard University with Leon Kirchner and in Italy with Luciano Berio, Franco Donatoni and Luigi Dallapiccola. Before joining the music faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is currently Professor of Music, he taught at Harvard and at Boston University. Among his awards are a Fulbright Fellowship to Italy, the Rome Prize Fellowship, the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship of the American Institute of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship and a NEA recording grant. His works have been performed throughout the United States and in Europe, beginning with *Divergences* (1974), premiered at the Settimana Musicale Chigiana, and later performed by Speculum Musicae in Boston (1977), continuing with many chamber ensemble and orchestra works including *All Hallows* (1982) for chamber ensemble (commissioned by the Boston Musica Viva) and a ballet, *Rim of Heaven* commissioned by the University of California, Berkeley (1984) both performed at the Edinburgh Festival. His works have been commissioned and performed by the RAI Orchestra of Rome, Musical Elements (New York), Alea III (Boston) and the Brooklyn Philharmonic, among others. *Resonance* (1986), a work for orchestra, was

premiered by the San Francisco Symphony. The success of that performance resulted in a commission for *Into the Twilight: Three Movements for Orchestra*, premiered by the San Francisco Symphony, Herbert Blomstedt conductor, in May, 1988.

The Berkeley Shakespeare Festival (now the California Shakespeare Festival) commissioned two scores from John Thow for innovative productions of *A Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (1988, 1989). Two recent works for voice and chamber ensemble are *When You Were Born* (1987), first performed by the Earplay ensemble of San Francisco and *A Water Cycle* (1991), premiered by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (in collaboration with members of the San Francisco Opera). Newly commissioned works include *A New Voluntary* (1990) for organ solo and *Concertino* (1991) for eight players, commissioned by the Detroit Chamber Winds. In 1991-92, two new works, *Trilce* for the North-South Alliance and a new orchestral work for the Camellia Orchestra will receive first performances.

All Hallows was commissioned by the Boston Musica Viva, who premiered the work in October 1982 in Cambridge and has since played the work many times on tour in the United States and in Scotland at the Edinburgh Festival.

The title comes from a poem by Louise Gluck—one decidedly not about Halloween or the day after, but one which takes the images of the time of year to create an interior landscape, invoked in the first movement by the music of the alto flute and later, the viola. The second movement, "Capriccio," is in contrast a rapidly moving ensemble piece which parodies the music of "Landscape." Here repetitive rhythmic and melodic ideas develop what before was lyric and almost static. In the last movement, "Metamorphosis," the music of the previous two movements is transformed through a series of solo cadenzas for violin, cello, and piano into a dance-like final section which gradually condenses and dissolves the music as

if it were evaporating into the autumn air.

—John Thow

Boston Musica Viva (est. 1969) was the first professional chamber ensemble formed in Massachusetts to perform exclusively 20th-century music. With rare exceptions, a new work is premiered at each BMV concert, usually a work that music director Richard Pittman requests of an American composer. Concerts feature the seven-musician core ensemble, but this core is often augmented for larger works. In addition, music-theater and multi-media productions sometimes involve collaborations with other organizations, such as theater and dance groups. BMV's programming embraces works that might otherwise not be heard. At the same time, BMV offers consistent and reliable support to living composers by giving outstanding performances of their works. Under the direction of founder and music director Richard Pittman, the Boston Musica Viva has performed over 374 works by 168 composers, including 79 works written for BMV, 80 world premieres, and 46 Boston premieres. In 1991, the Boston Musica Viva was awarded the American Composers Alliance Laurel Leaf Award for "distinguished achievement in fostering and encouraging American music."

In addition to its concerts at home, BMV regularly offers programs throughout New England and the United States, featuring works by American composers. On four European tours and two special trips to European festivals, the Boston Musica Viva has performed American music almost exclusively; the group has introduced concert, radio and television audiences in ten European countries to works by American composers. Given strong first performances by BMV, many of the works written for the ensemble have entered the repertoire, to be taken up throughout

America and in Europe. BMV is particularly proud to have championed numerous composers who later won Pulitzer prizes, among them John Harbison, Donald Martino, Joseph Schwantner and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

The Boston Musica Viva attracts a variety of audiences with programming that has incorporated the visual arts, dance, multi-media, music-theater and opera. Beyond the concert hall, Boston Musica Viva has made twelve recordings and is developing a library of performances on video. Domestic tours have brought the ensemble to Lincoln Center, the Schoenberg Institute, the Library of Congress, Carnegie Recital Hall, the 92nd Street Y, Tanglewood, and numerous colleges and concert series. Educational activities have become increasingly important to the group: Boston Musica Viva is committed to introducing new music to students and adults through educational residency and outreach activities.

Richard Pittman founded the Boston Musica Viva in 1969 and continues as its music director and conductor. Although he has built his career on 20th century repertoire, the scope of his activity belies this specialist's image. A former member of the conducting faculty for both orchestra and opera at the Eastman School of Music, where he was the founder-director of the Eastman Musica Nova, he has also taught orchestral conducting at the New England Conservatory. His own teachers have included Pierre Boulez, Sergiu Celibidache and Laszlo Halasz. In Europe, he has conducted all four BBC orchestras, the London Sinfonietta and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony. In the United States, he has conducted the National Symphony, the Nebraska Chamber Orchestra and the Concerto Soloists in Philadelphia. Mr. Pittman is also currently the music director of the Concord Orchestra in Massachusetts.

—Performers—

A City Called Heaven

Olly Wilson

Renée Krimsier, flute

William Wrzesien, clarinet

Nancy Cirillo, violin

Katherine Anderson, viola

Ronald Lowry, cello

John McDonald, piano

Raising the Gaze

Peter Lieberson

Renée Krimsier, flute

William Wrzesien, clarinet

Nancy Cirillo, violin

Katherine Anderson, viola

Andrew Mark, cello

John McDonald, piano

“...in the receding mist...”

by Bernard Rands

Nancy Cirillo, violin

Katherine Anderson, viola

Andrew Mark, cello

Susan Robinson, harp

All Hallows

by John Thow

Renée Krimsier, flute

William Wrzesien, clarinet

Nancy Cirillo, violin

Katherine Anderson, viola

Ronald Lowry, cello

John McDonald, piano

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1	-	3	Olly Wilson • A City Called Heaven	20:06
4			Peter Lieberson • Raising the Gaze	6:56
5			Bernard Rands • "...in the receding mist" Universal Editions	10:35
6	-	8	John Thow • All Hallows	18:16
Total				56:18

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